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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
ACDA-07 TRSE-00 SAJ-01 OMB-01 EB-07 CU-02 /099 W
----------271902Z 001944 /44
R 271505Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2482
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
USMISSION GENEVA
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSMTPARIS
AMEMBASSY TLL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USUN
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 20107

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR UR US XF PLO
SUBJECT: SOVIET MFA OFFICIAL ON MEPC

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. IN A DECEMBER 23 TOUR D' HORIZON ON M.E.
WITH CHARGE, CHIEF OF MFA NEAR EASTERN COUNTRIES DEPARTMENT,
M.D. SYTENKO:

-- EMPHASIZED IMPORTANCE OF GETTING STARTED AT
GENEVA MEPC;

-- EXPLAINED SOVIET CONCEPT OF FIRST STAGE OF TWO-STAGE
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CONFERENCE (ONE OR TWO DAY SESSION TO DISCUSS AGENDA);

-- OPPOSED IDEA THAT FIRST STAGE CONFERENCE MIGHT
ITSELF DISCUSS FORM OF PALESTINIAN PARTICIPATION, BUT
NONETHELESS INDICATED THAT METHOD OF NECESSARY PALESTINIAN
PARTICIPATION WAS A QUESTION FOR ARABS TO SETTLE;

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-- DOUBTED THAT ISRAELIS WOULD ABSENT THEMSELVES FROM CONFERENCE IF AMERICANS MADE CLEAR THEIR OWN RESOLVE;

-- IMPLIED THAT U.S. AND SOVIET UNION SHOULD CONSULT ON HOW TO PROCEED AS CO-CHAIRMEN OF CONFERENCE; AND

-- EXPRESSED JUDGMENT THAT "MUTUALSJECOGNITION" OF ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN STATE WOULD FLOW AUTOMATICALLY FROM SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS AT GENEVA, BUT COULD NOT BE ACHIEVED BEFORE THE CONFERENCE. SYTENKO'S EXTENSIVE COMMENTS ON THE MECHANICS OF AND PROSPECTS FOR GENEVA IMPLY THAT THE SOVIETS ARE LIKELY TO PUSH THIS LINE VIGOROUSLY WITH THE NEW ADMINISTRATION. END SUMMARY.

2. IN BEGINNING DISCUSSION, CHARGE ASKED SYTENKO TO EVALUATE GENERAL SITUATION IN M.E. AND TO OUTLINE PROSPECTS FOR 1977. SYTENKO SAID THAT IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO SPEAK OF PROSPECTS SINCE "ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN" BUT THAT, IN GENERAL, 1977 COULD BE A FAVORABLE YEAR FOR A SOLUTION IN THE M.E. IF THERE IS A DESIRE TO REACH A SOLUTION. SYTENKO FELT THAT IF THE U.S. AND THE SOVIET UNION WANTED TO PREVENT NEW EXPLOSIONS IN THE M.E., THEN GENEVA AND NOT SOME NEW CONFERENCE WAS THE WAY TO DO IT. HE REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED THE THEME THAT NO ALTERNATIVES TO GENEVA SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AND HE IMPLIED THAT THE U.S. AND THE SOVIET UNION SHOULD WORK TOGETHER TO "FIND A COMMON LANGUAGE AND A COMMON APPROACH ON HOW TO PROCEED AS CO-CHAIRMEN" OF THE CONFERENCE.

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3. ASKED HOW HE FORESAW PREPARATORY STEPS TOWARD GENEVA, SYTENKO JOKINGLY REPLIED "JUST SIT UP A TABLE FOR NEGOTIATIONS AND BEGIN". AMPLIFYING, HE SAID SOVIETS WERE FOR A PRELIMINARY CONFERENCE AS THE SECRETARY HAD PROPOSED, BUT IN A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT WAY: A ONE OR TWO-DAY MEETING WITH SOLE TASK OF DETERMINING THE AGENDA ITEMS, AND THEN IMMEDIATELY BEGINNING OF THE SUBSTANTIVE STAGE. "WE HAVE NO ILLUSIONS THAT ALL THE SUBSTANTIVE PROBLEMS CAN BE SETTLED QUICKLY, BUT THE REGULAR CONFERENCE MUST BEGIN." ALL PROBLEMS SHOULD BE DISCUSSED IN WORKING GROUPS OR COMMITTEES SIMULTANEOUSLY. SOME WORKING GROUPS WILL MAKE QUICKER PROGRESS THAN OTHERS, BUT TIME SHOULD NOT BE WASTED WAITING FOR RESOLUTION OF ONE ASPECT OF M.E. PROBLEMS BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH OTHERS. IN THIS REGARD, SYTENKO SAID THAT FOUR POINTS IN SOVIET AGENDA PROPOSAL OF OCTOBER WERE INSEPARABLE AND WERE MEANT TO BE DISCUSSED AT SAME TIME.

4. CHARGE REPEATEDLY RAISED PROBLEM OF PALESTINIAN

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PARTICIPATION IN THE CONFERENCE. SYTENKO DID NOT EMPLOY USUAL FORMULE ,"PARTICIPATION ON A BASIS OF FULL EQUALITY AND FROM VERY BEGINNING," BUT DID SAY THAT PALESTINIANS HAD TO BE PRESENT AND THAT FORM OF PALESTINIAN PARTICIPATION WAS A MATTER BETWEEN ARABS AND PALESTINIANS. HE DID NOT FORESEE QUESTION OF PALESTINIAN PARTICIPATION BEING DISCUSSED AT PRELIMINARY CONFERENCE, AND SAID THAT ANY PROPOSAL IN THIS REGARD WOULD MAKE FOR A DIFFERENT CONFERENCE. HE WAS OBSTINATE IN DENYING THE REVERSE POINT, THAT INCLUSION OF PALESTINIANS IN THE CONFERENCE WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENT CONFERENCE THAN THE ONE AGREED UPON IN 1973. CITING INCREASED INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION WHICH PLO HAD GARNERED SINCE 1973, HE POINTED OUT THAT U.S. DID NOT NOW OPPOSE SYRIAN PARTICIPATION ALTHOUGH SYRIA HAD NOT PARTICIPATED IN 1973, AND ADDED HIS OPINION THAT PALESTINIANS WERE NOW READY TO SIT AND NEGOTIATE WITH ISRAELIS AS THEY HAD NOT BEEN EARLIER.

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5. SYTENKO SAID SOVIET IMPRESSION WAS THAT ISRAELIS DID NOT WANT TO NEGOTIATE, AND THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT WANT TO SIT ACROSS TABLE FROM PALESTINIANS NO MATTER WHAT SOLUTION WAS REACHED TO PROBLEM OF PALESTINIAN PARTICIPATION. HE ADDED THAT ISRAEL WOULD NONETHELESS BE AT TABLE IF U.S. WAS SERIOUS ABOUT NEGOTIATING.

6. SYTENKO DEBUNKED IDEA THAT "LEGAL RECOGNITION", ESTABLISHMENT OF TRADE, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL TIES WOULD BE POSSIBLE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ITS ANTAGONISTS IN IMMEDIATE FUTURE. CONDITIONS FOR SUCH DEVELOPMENTS HAD TO BE CREATED; ACT OF SITTING ACROSS TABLE IN GENEVA COULD CREATE AN "ATMOSPHERE OF RECOGNITION" WHICH WOULD BE ENHANCED BY ALL SIDES SIGNING THE FORMAL DOCUMENT WHICH WOULD CONCLUDE THE CONFERENCE.

7. SYTENKO SIDESTEPPED A QUESTION ON PALESTINIAN WILLINGNESS TO LIMIT THEIR TERRITORIAL CLAIMS ON ISRAEL BY CITING DIFFICULTY OF PALESTINIANS' AND ISRAELIS' CONTINUING TO TALK OF DESTROYING THE OTHER WHILE SITTING AT SAME TABLE. HE EMPHASIZED CONSISTENCY OF SOVIET POSITION ON EXISTENCE OF ISRAELI STATE, SAID SOVIET UNION HAD SUFFERED "A LOT OF UNPLEASANTNESS" WITH ARABS OVER THIS, AND CONCLUDED THAT, THEREFORE, THERE WAS NO NEED TO "ACCENTUATE" THE CLAIMS OF THE PALESTINIANS IN THIS REGARD.

8. CHARGE ASKED ABOUT OPPONENTS OF GENEVA--THEPALESTINIAN EXTREMISTS, THE LIBYANS AND THE IRAQIS. SYTENKO SAID THAT SOVIETS DID NOT AGREE WITH POSITION OF HABASH AND HIS GROUP. HE ADMITTED THAT IRAQ AND LIBYA REMAINED COMPLETELY

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NEGATIVE "IN PRINCIPLE", BUT PROFESSED TO SEE SOME SOFTENING IN THAT THESE TWO SIDES DID NOT SPEAK SO STRONGLY ABOUT GENEVA AS BEFORE.

9. SYTENKO SAID THAT WHILE IT WAS TOO EARLY TO SPEAK OF DETAILS OF M.E. GUARANTIES, HE COULD SEE ALL SORTS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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POSSIBLE COMBINATIONS: "MAYBE UNSC, MAYBE BIG POWERS (USSR, US, UK, FRANCE), MAYBE SOME OTHER FORMS". MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THIS CONTEXT WOULD BE TO DECIDE ON ESSENCE OF "WHAT" WAS TO BE GUARANTEED. THE ISRAELIS CALL FOR SECURE BORDERS, BUT BORDERS THEY ENVISION ARE THE MOST INSECURE SINCE THEY WOULD INVITE CONFLICT, HE CONCLUDED.

10. COMMENT. ADDRESSEES MAY FIND MORE NOVELTY IN SYTENKO'S PRESENTATION THAN WE DO. SYTENKO STRESS ON GENEVA IS CONSISTENT WITH SOVIET PUBLIC LINE, AND HIS HINTS OF FLEXIBILITY ON PARTICIPATION PROBLEM HAVE BEEN STAPLE OF PRIVATE COMMENTS IN RECENT WEEKS. IT IS HARD TO SHARE HIS VIEWS (A) THAT ALL SIDES INCLUDING THE PALESTINIANS CAN SO EASILY BE BROUGHT TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE AND, (B) THAT GOOD THINGS WILL AUTOMATICALLY FLOW FROM THE VERY ACT OF CONVENING THE CONFERENCE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE VEHEMENCE WITH WHICH SYTENKO MADE HIS PITCH SUGGESTS SOVIETS SEE AT LEAST FIGHTING CHANCE OF MOVING THE NEW ADMINISTRATION IN THIS DIRECTION.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONAL OPINION, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION, PARTY MEETINGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MOSCOW20107
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760473-0153
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761213/aaaaakrp.tel
Line Count: 197
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 MAY 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <07 SEP 2004 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

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US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOVIET MFA OFFICIAL ON MEPC
TAGS: PFOR, UR, US, XF, PLO, (SYTENKO, M D)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006